

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7481

INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO

AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRASILIA 7387

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, BR

SUBJECT: INTIAL REACTION TO BOMBING INCIDENTS

REF: RIO DE JANEIRO 3161 NOTAL

1. SUMMARY: BOMB INCIDENTS IN RIO AND PORTO ALEGRE HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO CLIMATE OF GLOOM AND APPREHENSION IN POLITICAL CIRCLES AND EVOKED CONDEMNATIONS OF EXTREMISTS BY POLITICAL LEADERS IN BOTH PARTIES AND BY PRESS. IN THESE CIRCLES BOMBINGS GENERALLY SUSPECTED TO BE RIGHTWING COUNTERATTACK TO BLOCK NOVEMBER ELECTIONS AND FORCE GOVERNMENT TO RESUME HARDLINE. UNDER FREQUENT ATTACK FOR ENCOURAGING "RADICALIZATION" IS ARENA CONGRESSIONAL LEADER JOSE BONIFACIO, WHO LAST WEEK MADE SERIES OF SENSATIONAL ACCUSATION OF COMMUNIST INFILTRATION IN PRESS, SCHOOLS AND OPPOSITION. WHILE ARENA LEADERS ASSURE THAT ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD AS PLANNED, PRESIDENT HAS REMAINED SILENT ON INCIDENT. DOUBTS PERSIST THAT INVESTIGATION BY SECURITY FORCES WILL YIELD SOLID RESULTS. END SUMMARY.

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2. AUGUST 20 FIREBOMBING OF MILITARY TRIBUNAL IN PORTO

ALEGRE HAS ADDED TO ALREADY HEAVY CLIMATE OF APPREHENSION AND GLOOM IN POLITICAL AND PRESS CIRCLES LEFT BY AUGUST 19 BOMB INCIDENTS AT RIO OFFICES OF PRESS AND BAR ASSOCIATIONS (REFTEL). NO GROUPS HAVE CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR PORTO ALEGRE BOMBING, WHICH CAUSED ONLY MINOR DAMAGE, THOUGH PREVAILING SUPPOSITION IS THAT ATTACK WAS WORK OF LEFTWING SINCE TRIBUNAL WAS TO BE VENUE OF FORTHCOMING TRIAL OF GROUP OF SUSPECTED SUBVERSIVES. RIO INCIDENTS WERE FOLLOWED NEXT DAY BY SERIES OF TELEPHONE BOMB THREATS AGAINST GOVERNMENT OFFICES AND NATIONAL BISHOPS COUNCIL.

3. BOMBINGS, PARTICULARLY THOSE IN RIO, HAVE MET UNANIMOUS CONDEMNATION BY CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS, STATE GOVERNORS, CIVIC AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND PRESS. INCIDENT WIDELY SEEN, ACCORDING TO PUBLIC COMMENTS, AS EFFORT OF RADICAL MINORITY TO CREATE CLIMATE OF UNREST AND UNCERTAINTY TO BLOCK PROGRESS OF POLITICAL NORMALIZATION AND FORCE CANCELLATION OF NOVEMBER 15 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS (FOR WHICH OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN PERIOD OPENED AUGUST 15). ARENA PARTY PRESIDENT FRANCELINO PEREIRA, SENATE MAJORITY LEADER PETRONIO PORTELLA AND CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES LEADER JOSE BONIFACIO MADE REASSURING STATEMENTS THAT ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD AS PLANNED.

4. BONIFACIO HIMSELF IS CENTRAL FIGURE IN DIAGNOSES IN EDITORIAL AND POLITICAL CIRCLES OF THIS LATEST ERUPTION OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE. COMMENTATORS IN MAJOR DAILIES, LIKE MUCH OF OPPOSITION MDB, HAVE CLAIMED THAT BONIFACIO HAS FURTHER HEATED ALREADY WARM POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT DURING PAST WEEK WITH SERIES OF SPEECHES AND INTERVIEWS--ON ONE OCCASION BRANDISHING MYSTERIOUS INTELLIGENCE DOCUMENTS--CHARGING GRAVE COMMUNIST INFILTRATION IN OR MANIPULATION OF PRESS, OPPOSITION, SCHOOLS, AND EVEN BUSINESS. BONIFACIO'S "WITCH HUNTING" IS INTERPRETED AS EFFORT TO BLOCK FURTHER PRESS EXPLOITATION OF LAST MONTH'S POLITICALLY DAMAGING EXPOSURES OF CORRUPTION IN HOUSEHOLDS OF "SUPERFUNCTIONARIES" (BRASILIA 6996 NOTAL) AND TO DIVERT PUBLIC ATTENTION FROM ISSUE BEFORE MDB CAN GATHER MORE ELECTION CAPITAL FROM IT. LESS CHARITABLE
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IS INTERPRETATION IN SOME PRESS AND POLITICAL CIRCLES THAT BONIFACIO'S CHARGES SIGNALS OPENING PHASE OF RIGHTIST CAMPAIGN TO BLOCK ELECTIONS ENTIRELY AND FORCE GOVERNMENT TO RETURN TO POLITICAL HARDLINE.

5. PRESS AND POLITICAL EXEGETES, HOWEVER, HAVE BEEN CAUTIOUSLY VAGUE IN SPECULATING ON IDENTITY OF RIO BOMBERS, CITING ONLY "RIGHTWING" OR "RADICAL" EXTREMISTS.

PRIVATELY, WEIGHT OF OPINION IN MILITARY AND POLITICAL CIRCLES SO FAR IS THAT RIO BOMBINGS ARE PROBABLY WORK OF RELATIVELY SMALL GROUP OF MISGUIDED ACTIVE OR RETIRED MILITARY AND SECURITY OFFICIALS. BRAZIL'S MOST ACTIVE RIGHTIST GROUP, "DEFENSE OF TRADITION, FAMILY, AND THE FATHERLAND," DENIED ANY CONNECTION WITH THE BOMBING. AND BONIFACIO HIMSELF BLAMES "COMMUNISTS" FOR INCIDENTS, INSISTING THAT BRAZIL HAS NO RIGHTWING ORGANIZATIONS CAPABLE OF SUCH ACTS.

6. PRESIDENT GEISEL, AS WELL AS JUSTICE MINISTER FALCAO, HAS DECLINED TO COMMENT ON BOMBINGS, THOUGH PRESIDENT'S PRESS SPOKESMEN AND MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND POLICE OFFICIALS HAVE ASSURED THAT INCIDENTS WILL BE THOROUGHLY PROBED. PRESIDENT'S SILENCE ITSELF IS SEEN AS CONTRIBUTING TO GLOOM. PRESS OBSERVERS HAVE NOTED THAT IN VISIT TO PERNAMBUCO DAY AFTER THE BOMBING, PRESIDENT MADE NO MENTION OF INCIDENT AND, IN SHARP CONTRAST TO RECENT SERIES OF HIGHLY POLITICAL VISITS TO INTERIOR POINTS, MADE NO REFERENCE WHATSOEVER TO UPCOMING MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. OPPOSITION SENATORS PAULO BROSSARD AND SATURNINO BRAGA HAVE PUBLICLY APPEALED TO PRESIDENT EITHER TO PROVIDE SOME REASSURING WORDS IN CURRENT ATMOSPHERE OF BEWILDERMENT OR TO CLARIFY TO WHAT EXTENT BONIFACIO'S BEHAVIOR HAS HIGH-LEVEL ACQUIESCENCE. SOME MDB LEADERS HAVE TOLD PRESS INCIDENTS HAVE ALREADY HAD DAMPENING EFFECT ON CAMPAIGN ZEAL OF MDB MUNICIPAL ELECTION CANDIDATES WHO, IN FACE OF INCREASED UNCERTAINTY, ARE LESS EAGER TO COMMIT TIME, ENERGY AND RESOURCES TO ELECTIONS.

7. COMMENT: PESSIMISM OVER TERRORISTS' INCIDENTS IS MORE UNDERSTANDABLE WHEN VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF CONTINUING ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTIES AND POLITICAL TURBULENCE
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OF THE PAST MONTH THAT HAS ACCOMPANIED PRESS EXPOSURES OF HIGH-LEVEL CORRUPTION, FORMER PRESIDENT MEDICI'S ATTACK ON "LIBERALISM" (BRASILIA 7143 NOTAL), FURTHER CASSATIONS OF PUBLIC FIGURES (BRASILIA 6992 NOTAL), AND LAST WEEK'S OPENING OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN. BRAZILIANS IN GENERAL, HOWEVER, MAY BE CONDITIONED TO TAKING OVERLY GRIM VIEW BECAUSE OF MARKED CONTRAST OF THE INCIDENTS WITH THE NOTABLY LOW LEVEL OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN RECENT YEARS, AND BECAUSE DAILY PRESENCE OF ARGENTINE ORDEAL ON FRONT PAGES MAY HAVE RAISED SUBLIMINAL FEARS OF SIMILAR POLARIZATION HERE. CURRENT APPREHENSION WOULD OF COURSE BE CONSIDERABLY EASED IF PRESIDENT BY WORD OR DEED WOULD DISPLAY CLEAR DETERMINATION TO STAY ON COURSE AND TO DEAL FIRMLY WITH RIGHTWING TERRORISTS. GENERAL IMPRESSION HERE AT THIS POINT IS THAT WHILE PRESIDENT NOT

LIKELY TO BACK OFF PLEDGE TO SEE ELECTIONS THROUGH, THERE
IS LESS CONFIDENCE THAT SECURITY FORCES WILL INVESTIAGE
RIO INCIDENTS WITH SAME VIGOR NORMALLY APPLIED TO
LEFTWING SUBVERSION. END COMMENT.
CRIMMINS

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